



The future Pope Benedict XVI refused to defrock an American priest who confessed to molesting numerous children and even served prison time for it, simply because the cleric wouldn't agree to the discipline.

The case provides the latest evidence of how changes in church law under Pope John Paul II frustrated and hamstrung U.S. bishops struggling with an abuse crisis that would eventually explode.

Documents obtained by The Associated Press from court filings in the case of the late Rev. Alvin Campbell of Illinois show Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, following church law at the time, turned down a bishop's plea to remove the priest for no other reason than the abuser's refusal to go along with it.

"The petition in question cannot be admitted in as much as it lacks the request of Father Campbell himself," Ratzinger wrote in a July 3, 1989, letter to Bishop Daniel Ryan of the Diocese of Springfield, Ill.

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